

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Keeping Cool

Summer has arrived, meaning swimming, boating, barbeques, sunshine and summer heat. The summer weather can also bring increased energy use for keeping cool. No one wants their energy bills to rise with the temperature, and finding ways to stay cool without cranking up the air conditioner saves money – and is better for the environment.

Air conditioners require a lot of energy to operate, and generating power means more air pollution and greenhouse gases being released into the environment. This contributes to global climate change – and runs up your electric bill. To save a few bucks in the long run – and to reduce your carbon footprint – there are plenty of “green” ways to keep cool this summer.

Easy, Low Cost Solutions:

- **Fans:** Use fans to keep air flowing. Ceiling fans can make a room feel up to seven degrees cooler, and they use less electricity than air conditioners. A medium-sized window AC unit uses 900 watts of energy, while a ceiling fan set at high speed uses just 75 watts. By using a ceiling fan and raising your AC thermostat by just two degrees, you can lower your cooling costs by up to 14 percent. And remember, a fan cools YOU, not the room, so be sure to turn it off when you leave the room.
- **Window Coverings:** Install window shades, drapes, or blinds to reflect heat away from the house. Close blinds, shades and drapes facing the sun during the day to keep the sun’s heat out and help fans or air conditioners cool more efficiently.
- **Heat Sources:** Reduce internal heat sources by turning off lights and computers when you’re not using them. Don’t use a stove or oven to cook – microwave your meals or grill outdoors. Incandescent light bulbs also create heat, so consider replacing them with compact florescent bulbs.
- **Air Conditioning:** If you use central air conditioning, program your thermostat to work around your family’s summer schedule by setting the temperature higher when no one is home. For any air conditioner, check the air filter regularly and change it when it is dirty, which can save 15 percent of the energy used. When buying a new air conditioner, look for one that is an ENERGY STAR product.

Longer-Term Solutions:

- **Plant Trees:** We already know trees are great for the environment, but most people probably don't realize they can also help cut cooling costs. By planting deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves in the winter) on the south and west sides of your house, you can reduce air conditioning costs in the summer by up to 30 percent, and still allow the sunlight to warm the house during the winter. Planting trees near driveways and patios can also help limit landscape heat load (heat that could otherwise be reflected back toward your house).
- **Roofs:** Another great way to keep your house cool in the summer is to install a light-colored or reflective roof. Light-colored roofs deflect scorching sunrays that black shingles absorb. This alternative may be pricy, but if you already have plans to renovate, consider opting for a gray or beige roof.
- **Windows:** Upgrading your windows is another cost-saving renovation to consider. If your windows are due for replacement, ENERGY STAR windows can make your home more comfortable year round.

In the car: Besides the house, the car is probably where people are most likely to crank the air conditioning to avoid a sweltering commute, but running the air conditioning works your engine harder and cuts down on fuel economy. When traveling slower than 40 mph, it's more fuel-efficient to roll down the windows. Reduce inside cabin temperature by parking in the shade, putting a sunshade in the windshield, and always roll down the windows when getting into a hot car.

We've already seen some record breaking temperatures this summer, and while it may not be realistic to eliminate the use of air conditioners altogether to keep cool, there are options that use less energy and don't raise your energy bill quite as much. So keep yourself cool while saving money — and the environment!

For more information, contact DES at 271-1370 or the Office of Energy and Planning at 271-2155.